

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-14 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06

SIL-01 DRC-01 TRSE-00 /156 W

----- 016426

R 031825Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6054

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL BELFAST BY POUCH

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 14140

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: CABINET SHUFFLE GIVES KEY ROLE TO WHITELAW

1. SUMMARY: HAVING CROWNED HIS TWENTY PUNISHING MONTHS AS PRO-CONSUL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND WITH THE SUCCESSFUL FORMATION OF AN EXECUTIVE, WILLIAM WHITELAW NOW RETURNS TO THE MAINSTREAM OF BRITISH POLITICS AS SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EMPLOYMENT. ON HIM WILL FALL THE FORMIDABLE BURDEN OF MAINTAINING THE GOVERNMENT'S COUNTER-INFLATION POLICY IN THE FACE OF MILITANT TRADE UNION DEMANDS FOR MASSIVE PAY INCREASES. HIS PATIENCE, NEGOTIATING SKILL, AND RENOWNED ABILITY TO RECONCILE THE IRRECONCILABLE WILL ALL BE SEVERELY TESTED IN THE MONTHS

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AHEAD AND ON HIS SUCCESS OR FAILURE MAY WELL DEPEND

THE GOVERNMENT'S FATE AT THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION.

END SUMMARY

2. THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY A LONG-EXPECTED CABINET RESHUFFLE TO BRING WILLIE WHITELAW'S CONSIDERABLE TALENTS BACK INTO THE MAIN ARENA OF BRITISH POLITICS. AFTER SERVING WITH EXTRAORDINARY SUCCESS FOR TWENTY MONTHS AS SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, WHITELAW HAS NOW BEEN APPOINTED SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EMPLOYMENT. HE REPLACES MAURICE MACMILLAN WHO WILL RETURN TO THE TREASURY AS DEPUTY TO CHANCELLOR BARBER WITH THE ADDITIONAL TITLE OF PAYMASTER GENERAL. WHITELAW'S DUTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND WILL BE ASSUMED BY FRANCIS PYM, WHOSE POSITION AS CHIEF WHIP WILL NOW BE FILLED BY HIS FORMER DEPUTY HUMPHREY ATKINS. NORMAN ST. JOHN-STEVAS MOVES UP A NOTCH IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE, TO BECOME MINISTER OF STATE, TAKING OVER IN EFFECT THE FUNCTION OF MINISTER OF ARTS FROM LORD ECCLES WHO RESIGNED AS PAYMASTER GENERAL.

3. COMMENT: THE RETURN OF WHITELAW GREATLY STRENGTHENS THE GOVERNMENT TEAM RESPONSIBLE FOR MANAGING THE ECONOMY, ESPECIALLY IN THE CRITICAL AREA OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS. HE IS EXPECTED TO BE A LEADING SPOKESMAN FOR EXPLAINING AND DEFENDING THE GOVERNMENT'S COUNTER-INFLATION PROGRAM, FILLING A CRITICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS NEED IN THE RUN-UP TO THE GENERAL ELECTION.

4. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH POLITICAL COUNSELOR, WHITELAW SAID THAT IN HIS NEW POSITION HE WILL SEEK AN ACTIVE ROLE WITH BOTH MANAGEMENT AND LABOR IN THE RESOLUTION OF INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES. HE WILL TRY TO ANTICIPATE AND HEAD OFF CONFLICTS, RATHER THAN SIT BY AND WAIT FOR THEM TO COME TO A HEAD. HE SAID TOO THAT HENCEFORTH HIS OFFICE, RATHER THAN DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY, WOULD ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR SETTLING DISPUTES IN NATIONALIZED INDUSTRIES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 14140

5. MOST LEADING NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICIANS HAVE
EXPRESSED REGRET AT WHITELAW'S DEPARTURE, PARTICULARLY
AS TALKS ON THE CREATION OF A COUNCIL OF IRELAND ARE
TO OPEN DECEMBER 6. FROM THE GOVERNMENT'S POINT OF
VIEW, HOWEVER, THE TIMING OF THE TRANSFER IS COMPLETELY
UNDERSTANDABLE. THE FELT NEED TO HAVE WHITELAW BACK
IN THE MAIN POLITICAL AREA HAS BEEN MANIFEST FOR SOME
TIME. HE COMES NOW WITH HIS PRESTIGE AT AN ALL-TIME
HIGH; TO HAVE LEFT HIM ENMESHED IN THE UNCERTAINTIES OF
IRISH POLITICS WOULD HAVE RUN THE RISK OF SEEING THAT
PRESTIGE POSSIBLY ERODED. FURTHERMORE, NOW THAT THE
NI EXECUTIVE HAS BEEN FORMED, HMG AS A MATTER OF POLICY
WILL WISH TO DIMINISH ITS INVOLVEMENT IN NI POLITICS.

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PYM SEEMS AN IDEAL CHOICE TO REPLACE WHITELAW. HE IS
RETICENT WHERE WHITELAW IS EBULLIENT, AND DOES NOT ENJ-
OY THE SAME PUBLIC PROMINENCE, YET IN HIS THREE YEARS
AS CHIEF WHIP HAS SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE INTELLIGENT,
HARD-WORKING, AND AN EXCELLENT MANAGER.

6. MACMILLAN PERFORMED POORLY AS SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR EMPLOYMENT, LARGEMLY BECAUSE HE LACKS ANY NATURAL
GIFT FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS, BUT IT IS GENERALLY
RECOGNIZED THAT HE WAS SIMPLY THE WRONG MAN FOR THE

JOB. IT IS EXPECTED HE WILL MAKE A MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE GOVERNMENT'S COUNTER-INFLATION PROGRAM BACK IN TREASURY WHERE HE SERVED COMPETENTLY BEFORE. TO SOFTEN THE DEMOTION, HEATH HAS MADE HIM PAYMASTER GENERAL (A TITLE WITHOUT A DEFINED JOB) AND RETAINED HIM IN THE CABINET. (WITH PYM'S ACCESSION, THE CABINET NOW NUMBERS TWENTY.)

7. IT IS BELIEVED THAT HEATH HAS IN MIND A FURTHER SHUFFLING OF HIS CABINET TO BRING FORWARD SOME OF THE YOUNGER BACKBENCHERS. THIS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY INVOLVE THE REPLACEMENT OF JOHN DAVIES, MINISTER FOR COORDINATING EUROPEAN AFFAIRS, BUT WITH SIR ALEC AWAY IN MOSCOW, AND IMPORTANT EC MINISTERIAL MEETINGS IN PROGRESS, DAVIES CANNOT EASILY BE SHIFTED JUST NOW.

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